

REMARKS

In the 9/9/2006 Office Action, claims 23-27 and 30-31 were rejected as being anticipated by the disclosure of U.S Patent Application Publication 2003/0139130 of Steffler et al. Claims 28 and 32 were rejected as being directed to an invention that would have been obvious from Steffler. Claim 29 was rejected as obvious from Steffler in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,882,811 to Ewing.

The present invention is directed to automated systems and methods for automatically controlling functions such as water, power, gas, and equipment usage in an animal processing facility. In particular, at least one sensor is provided at a poultry-processing facility for sensing the presence of each animal unit at the input of a predetermined process or system. The invention is especially well suited for tracking each animal unit through the process or system using animal unit sensing outputs, while coordinating at least one function of the predetermined process or system in an automated, integrated manner based upon the animal unit sensing outputs. The sensor is at an upstream station and the result of the sensing operations is used to control a processing station downstream of the sensor. The feature that the second processing station is downstream of the first processing station is clear from applicant's Figures 1 and 3.

The primary reference US Patent Publication No. 2003/0139130 to Steffler, et al. discloses a poultry processing systems in which decisions as to what chicken paws can be safely harvested are carried out. With reference to Figure 1 of the Steffler, et al. publication, the chickens are hung by their feet at point 18 of a kill line 12. Along that kill line they are killed, bled, and de-feathered until at point 20 on that line a knife severs the legs at the drumstick. The main carcass is then transferred at transfer station 16 to the evisceration line 14. In the

evisceration line 14, the birds are inspected first at inspection point 38 and at stages 44-46 and 48. If any of the inspectors believe that a bird is below grade, he or she removes it from the shackle from which it is riding on the visceration line 14, leaving the shackle without a bird. This is sensed at one or more of sensors 54 or 52. Meanwhile, the leg and foot portion continues to travel on the kill line 12 until it reaches a paw harvesting station 24. By the time the paws reach station 24, after passing through the dancer loops 60, the evaluation by the inspectors 40, 44, 46 and 48 has taken place, so that shackles on the line 14 that do not have a bird on them because it was rejected for quality reasons are correlated with the shackles on the kill line 20. The same judgment as to the acceptability of the main carcass is applied to the feet. Thus, empty shackles on the line 14 signify that the feet that correlate to them on the line 12 are not harvested at harvest stations 28. Thus, there are two separate conveyor lines in the Steffler, et al. apparatus. Detection of shackles without carcasses on one line is used as an input on another line, not at different locations on the same line.

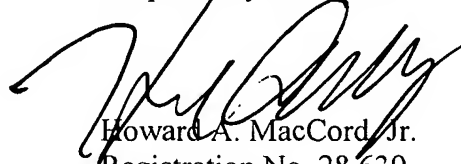
Applicant's claims have been amended to specify that the sensors located at a first processing station and the control system coordinates a function of a second processing station downstream of the first processing station along the conveyor. Thus, the claims distinguish from the Steffler, et al. structure. Since both stations are on the same conveyor, unlike Steffler, et al.

Nor would it have been obvious to modify Steffler, et al. to do so. The processing described in the Steffler, et al. publication clearly suggests that the separation of the feet from the carcass takes place well before any decisions are made about the carcass evaluation, so that trying to recombine the two into one line simply would not work. Accordingly, since the claims are patentable over the Steffler, et al. publication, the applications should be allowed, since all rejections were premised on disclosure by or obviousness from the Steffler, et al. publication.

Moreover, the prior art does not disclose the subject matter of applicant's new claim 33, which recites that a controller that can detect stoppage of the conveyor based upon data from the sensor. The movement of the conveyor line is set forth as being detected at page 7, line 10 of the specification, so this is not new matter.

In view of the foregoing amendments and for the above reasons, it is believed that this application is now in condition for allowance. If unresolved issues remain, the Examiner is invited to telephone applicant's attorney at the number below.

Respectfully submitted,



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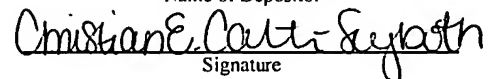
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